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ABSTRACT

Student rights and responsibilities vis-a-vis knowledge (methods of study) and purposes of schooling are dealt with. In the area of knowledge, there are two important ethical concerns: students must be able to pursue truth and students have a right to privacy. Turning to the purposes of schooling, it is clear that in social studies education, the rationales seem beyond reproach. Citizenship, awareness of cultural heritage, and economic literacy are only three of many reasons stated relative to the purposes of social studies programs. Yet, because of involvement in the total schooling process and because of the almost mindless acceptance of the contradictions between stated purposes and the classroom, school administration, and societal practices, some ethical problems arise. Some concerns reflecting this condition include using children to change society, grading students for societal convenience, and training students with utilitarian skills deemed necessary by society's need for workers, parents, and citizens. At the core of this dilemma is the ethical issue of whether or not the school should prepare the student directly for society. Educators and society should consider possible ethical implications of educational developments which stress social needs and utilitarian skills at the expense of student rights. (Author/DB)

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THE ETHICS OF OUR PROFESSION: THE STUDENT AND SCHOOLING*

Ethics have to do with the relationships that exist between and among people, with the modes of conduct that exist within a profession, and with the moral principles of the cultural heritage to which a society or civilization makes reference. In any discussion of pedagogy and ethics, it would seem that two notions come immediately to the forefront. First of all, there is the concept of knowledge (the right and responsibility to know) and the methods of studying and developing such knowledge. Second, there is the concern for purpose. That is, for what ends or reasons is knowledge so studied and developed? Certainly, the two ideas of knowledge and purpose are interrelated, but their separation here is appropriate for analysis; which, by the way, is an ethical decision of professional conduct.

Given the fact that the people involved in education, such as students, teachers (and authors), and parents (taxpayers, and other interested parties) have different biases relative to knowledge (method) and purpose, it is inevitable that dilemmas will develop and since these dilemmas involve relationships among people, professional modes of conduct and references to the cultural heritage, said dilemmas become ethical questions.

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These areas of concern can be drawn so as to establish points of intersection between individual and group rights and the notions of knowledge and purpose. Such a framework can also point out possible areas of conflict, that is, the delineating of rights and the movement away from educational equilibrium and ethical parity. Parity meaning here an equivalency of liberty within a community as well as a sense of individual (and group) responsibility to self (each person) and said community.

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*Address given by H. Michael Hartoonian, Program Coordinator, Social Studies Education, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, at the CUFA General Session of the National Council for the Social Studies Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., November 4, 1976.

Looking at each aspect of the model we can build some understanding of the dynamics that exist among the several elements.

	Knowledge Methods of Study	Purposes of Schooling
Rights of Students		
Rights of Teachers-Administrators (and/or authors)		
Rights of Society (Parents)		

This paper will deal only with the student and his or her rights and responsibilities vis-a-vis knowledge (methods of study) and purpose(s) of schooling.

The rights of students What does this mean? Educationally, it does not mean things like "the student has the right to read" or "the student has the right to know American history" in the sense that reading and historical knowledge are intrinsic qualities that will simply blossom forth. Indeed, we learn to read and we also learn our history in the same way we learn to play the piano or to shoot baskets...we practice...we work at it. In this context, students do not have a right to read, but a responsibility to know how to read as a member of a democratic society. But these are not rights we need to discuss here. These things, like the "right to read" are not, in fact, rights, but individual responsibilities that will lead to a loss of political, social and economic rights if not attended to. Such is the nature of the moral community; that is, knowledge is a function of freedom, and freedom, in turn, is necessary for responsible decision-making. Thus, the pursuit of knowledge and through it the possibility of individual freedom must be the work of the student, even when it seems to be against self interest or comfort.

Do we mean by student rights the complete freedom of curriculum choice? Should the student have the "right" to take anything or nothing in the school program? This suggests a right to be in touch with one's culture or not; sensitive

to art and literature or not; able to argue rationally and make appropriate decisions or not. Again, in a democratic setting there is no choice here...to the limits of one's ability, the individual is responsible to be in touch with his or her cultural heritage, and be able to make moral decisions.

We should be clear, then, on the issue of responsibilities in the learning process. Without this premise and without this effort by students, it makes little sense to talk about the educational rights of individuals. Democratically, as well as educationally, you cannot take from nor give to an individual something that is beyond the individual's willingness to embrace. Thus, the given in this situation must be the student's willingness to work at developing political, economic and social literacy. Without this attitude there can be no discussion of rights.

What, then, are the student's educational rights and how are they affected by the educational process? First of all, we should be concerned with the notion of "parity of rights" and the delimiting of student's rights to the point where they are out of step with said parity. As the rights of students are seen in relationship to other actors in the educational setting we can observe those areas where the greatest dangers appear relative to said rights. In the area of knowledge and methods of study there are two important ethical concerns:

1. THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH VERSUS THE PURSUIT OF WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE.
2. THE INVASION OF PRIVACY VERSUS THE USE OF THERAPEUTIC AND CLIENT-CENTERED METHODS OF STUDY.

With regard to the former, student rights are delimited when, for example, areas of inquiry are closed not only by the selection of content, but by the modes of presentation. Cicero once observed that the authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who wish to learn. This is certainly the case when educators confuse or do not delineate the pursuit of truth with the presentation of what is "acceptable." Much of what went on during the civil rights movement of the

late 60's...the inclusion of Black History in the social studies curriculum for example, was a manifestation of a plea for more truth. However, in many places it "was not acceptable." When teachers and/or authors suggest even tacitly that there is one truth...as with a particular interpretation of history, or as we sometines see in some curricular movements such as value clarification or in curricular organization patterns such as career education or a curriculum based upon behavioral outcomes, we are confusing acceptability with truth, and infringing upon the rights of students. Related to this "one truth" syndrome, is the bandwagon approach to educational change. When the bandwagon approach is used; that is, when a new fad comes by every year or so and educators feel obliged to "jump on," students' rights can be constricted by the fact that rationality seemed to go begging. If students' rights are to be respected, then the methods of study must embrace the highest intellectual limits that the educational community can muster. And, educators must understand the complexity of our human cultural heritage and the obligation we have to carry same to the next generation. In addition to carrying on the factual knowledge of the cultural heritage, we must also provide for the processes or way in which knowledge is studied and truth is pursued. This means a respect for the demands and integrity of logic as well as for the community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth. To the limit of the infringements upon the rights of educators and society, students must be able to pursue truth with skill, taste, and sensitivity. In a real sense, there must be a "social contract" between the student and teacher which addresses mutual respect, craftsmanship and integrity of work.

The second issue, that of the denial of a student's right to privacy is most repugnant in a democratic setting. In the case of its relationship to certain methods of study it is even more offensive because it speaks implicitly to the notion that the student is sick and in need of therapy. When students are coerced to reveal their "inner feelings" in a classroom and when teachers play at being

psychiatrists, psychologists or therapists we have a situation where the setting of 30 to 1 (patients to therapists) and the training of same therapists must raise ethical concerns of privacy invasions as well as tests of competency. In addition to the question of privacy, there is the additional dilemma in some methods of study that argue for a relativistic moral position...sort of an "if I feel okay, it must be right"...or..."let's take a vote on it to see if it's right." This is a serious ethical and methodological issue with which educators must come to grips. Just because we feel good or a vote is taken does not make a situation right. Yet this type of methodology or thinking permeates many of the personal and social decisions made today. For example, there are some communities and even states that feel they can "take a vote" or survey, call it a needs assessment, and then turn around and use it on citizens and students to "tell you what you need." It seems to have never occurred to the authors of such assessments whether or not the ballot box is an appropriate way of defining cultural and/or educational needs. A similar situation takes place when an issue like abortion is placed on the ballot. The assumption is that if people vote abortion up it will be okay and right, and if they vote it down, it will be bad, indeed, immoral. It is interesting to note that Lincoln faced a similar situation in the Kansas-Nebraska debates. As you recall in that setting, the issue was whether or not settlers in the new territories could vote slavery in or vote it out. Lincoln suggested that it didn't make any sense to vote slavery up or down for slavery was a moral issue and beyond the methodological power of the ballot box.

Turning to the second category; that of the purposes of schooling and student rights, it is clear that in social studies education, rationales seem to be beyond reproach. Citizenship, awareness of cultural heritage, and economic literacy are only three of many reasons stated relative to the purposes of social studies programs. Yet, because of our involvement in the total schooling process and because of the

almost mindless acceptance of the contradictions between stated purposes and classroom, school administrative, and societal practices, some ethical problems arise. I would like us to look at the following concerns which reflect this condition:

1. USING CHILDREN TO CHANGE SOCIETY.
2. GRADING STUDENTS FOR SOCIETAL CONVENIENCE.
3. TRAINING STUDENTS WITH UTILITARIAN SKILLS DEEMED NECESSARY BY SOCIETY'S NEED FOR WORKERS, PARENTS, AND CITIZENS.

The first issue dates back in our history at least to 1932 and George Count's rhetorical question in book form, "Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?" Counts made the now popular claim that since educators represented neither the interests of the moment nor of any special economic or social class, they could seek and use power on behalf of the "great masses of the people." As noble as this charge was and is, it fails to deal with the philosopher/king dichotomy. That is, can the profession of pedagogy influence political power and morality at the same time? This is what Counts was rhetorically asking. However, there are at least two ethical problems with this question that we seem unwilling to face relative to students' rights:

1. Whose image of the future are we to move toward?
2. Why should children have to play the role of experimental creatures in the social experiments?

Most of us would say that we should move toward a more just society and plan to build a situation where the human habitat and the natural environment are in harmony. Again, very noble in intent, but there are concerns of definition as well as method here. To what extent do we study the nature of justice? What is justice? What is the just society? What is a just person? Can we move toward a concept like justice which receives such a small amount of attention in school? Next, take our method of implementing justice. The idea is usually set for action in the next generation. If we want a just society, and can define same, perhaps we should practice justice

now...in our schools, and in our communities. How can we tell Black and White children, for example, to live and work together when the adult models won't? In this light, forced busing of students for racial balance is a cop-out...our problem is not geography, it's attitudinal and attitudes are changed not by telling or talking at children or even moving them around, but by what they see in the character of adults. They are saying to us..."I can't hear a word you are saying, for what you are is speaking too loudly." If we are going to use buses on students let's make sure that other items are also accounted for, like open housing and employment opportunities. A "parity of rights" should exist between child and adult...the children can't do it alone.

On the other hand, we hear quite often that experimenting with the lives of students doesn't hurt them. Indeed, life is an experiment. Hurting, however, is not the issue...the manipulation of human life is. If, experimentation is desirable in the first place, perhaps it should begin with that adults. At least, we ought to ask; "by what right does society use children to foster change?"

A second issue that has to do with the purposes of schooling and students' rights is the grading procedures which are used and are, I believe, analogous to the situation that took place in a pickle factory I used to work in as a teenager. In this factory, farmers and pickers would bring cucumbers to the plant and empty their sacks or trucks on conveyer belts that would carry the cucumbers to a vibrating grid. The grid had various sized openings ranging from approximately two inches at the beginning to approximately one foot at the end. Cucumbers would fall upon the grid and would "move along" until their size and the size opening in the grid coincided and they were "graded." Thus, number "ones" fell in one group, number "twos" in another, number "threes" in a third and so forth until only the very large cucumbers were left and they were turned into relish. This grading procedure made it very convenient for the processors who could come by and pick out the number "ones" or the number "threes" they wanted.

In a real sense this grading process in the pickle factory is not unlike the grading process in schools. In most instances, the procedure of grading a student has more to do with societal considerations than with individual growth. Employers want to know what kind of student they are hiring. Universities want to know how students do and will do, in their academic work. Again, we should be willing to argue, by what right do schools "grade" their students for societal efficiency?

Finally, there is the ethical issue of whether the purpose of school is to prepare the student directly for the present society. Is the purpose for running school utilitarian in nature? Should it relate to the present societal need (and norms) for workers, parents, and citizens? "Education for something" seems to be the plea here. A job, a happy married life, better mental health are examples of why we run schools. Some say education is needed to socialize students, to bring them into society. Noble reasons, all...but intellectually weak and dangerously misleading. Although education may be helpful in all of the above endeavors, it is different from political advocacy, social work, and psychiatry. Everything is what it is and not something else, and citizens (educators and others) must be clear relative to their rationale for schooling. The first questions can never be "What" or "How" we do things to children. The important or first questions are "Why" and "Should" we do things to children.

Thus, the rights of the student can be truncated when educators and society fail to look at the ethical dilemmas of: (1) the pursuit of truth versus what is acceptable; (2) the right of privacy versus the use of certain methods of study; (3) using children to change society versus the desire for a "better" society; (4) grading students versus society's desire to more effectively use educated human resources; and (5) the opportunity to be put in touch with one's cultural heritage (general human culture) versus society's need for utilitarian skills.

It is hoped that the above discussion can provide one useful way of dealing with and understanding the ethical underpinnings of schooling relative to the rights of students. The notion in most need of understanding however, is the dynamics, the give-and-take, that exists when said rights of students, together with those of educators and society are functioning in the same cultural setting. In other words, looking at rights per se is not enough. We should also analyze the degree of power and vulnerability that each actor has as a function of the rights of other actors. That is, the interest of other people must be considered in juxtaposition to self-interest. Consider the power and vulnerability of the student. Power is a function of autonomy, or self-government. It suggests an inner-control that is relative to the forces that control self from the outside... from others. Power is manifested most vividly in unilateral decision-making. At its best, power can provide self-harmony and feelings of self-sufficiency. At its worst, power infringes upon the self-harmony of others. Power is the opposite of vulnerability. Vulnerability speaks to the nakedness of the human being in terms of ability, dependency and adherence to social norms. Whether academic, athletic, sexual, artistic, or moral, our abilities are never what we would hope them to be, and to the degree that we feel inadequate, we are vulnerable and diminished in power.

Our dependency on other people and institutions is also widespread and demonstratable. Whether it's General Motors, the University of Wisconsin, or our families, we, as individuals are dependent; for that matter so are the institutions. Dependency is another name for order, and order and routine are necessary to institution, community or society. In fact, societies provide the means for developing dependency...it's called socialization. Children are dependent on parents and teachers. Teachers, in turn, are dependent on administrators who are dependent on Boards of Education, who are dependent on State Departments of Education, who are dependent on parents. Thus, are the roots of dependency nurtured...with fear, with the promise

of success and with self-esteem or enhanced reputation. In short, reputation is primarily a function of following societal norms, which, by the way, are changing and that presents more interesting problems. However, those who would deviate run a high risk of losing honor or reputation. Yet, it is interesting that many, if not most, of the world's most important reformers, scientists, artists and philosophers were non-conformists.

Understanding a parity of rights has much to do, then, with the trade-offs between power and vulnerability. They are both necessary in the just community ...be it a nation, a school or a family. It first appears strange that these two categories which are contradictory should help us understand ethics. But the human being is a mass of inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions. This is the case, regardless of how rational we seem to be in the actions of getting what we want. This latter tendency simply speaks to the fact that human beings know how to "play the game." Given the situation of "a parity of rights" as one attribute of justice it becomes immediately clear that this parity can only be achieved via total community development and involvement...a community where self-harmony and vulnerability; self-significancy and dependency can thrive. It must also be clear that ethics and equal rights are <u>not</u> the same. Indeed, the notion of treating all students the same, or treating adults and students alike is dysfunctional to justice and parity of rights. For example, an individual may need much more "discipline" or "strict rule enforcement" at age five than another individual or the same individual needs at age twenty-five. There must be, however, a parity of rights for the involved actors or groups of actors or responsible self-government will never be achieved or maintained. And, within the school setting, questions about the "purpose of schooling" and the "nature of knowledge," and their relationship to responsible self-government are central to any discussion of students' rights.

Perhaps an effective way to express this concept of responsible autonomy (the synthesis between self and others; between individual and state) is through the analogy of basketball. Basketball is an interesting craft in that it seems to take a high degree of athletic skill in many areas...strength, stamina, speed, quickness, jumping ability, timing, and grace, or at least gracefulness. What's interesting about this game is the analog one can see in it to the educational questions of purpose and methods (of study). At first glance one thinks the purpose of the basketball game is winning (or making money; which is related) but a closer look suggests that winning must be subjugated or made secondary to method(s). Individual ball players seek and find satisfaction in their knowledge of the game and their interpretation of that knowledge into action. The "method of study" <u>is</u> the purpose of the game to those involved in its playing. The team is a community (of scholars) and they are continually asking: "What is basketball?" "How can we live up to its standards, and, indeed, set higher standards?" Failing to act on these two questions is to fail absolutely. There is a parity of rights and there is justice (not equality) on the basketball floor. Without this "justice" certainly winning would be difficult or impossible. Each individual is vulnerable yet is in self-harmony. And, the team is vulnerable (to other teams, to fans, to officials, and to management), yet significant in itself. The ethical underpinnings of the team are found in its desire and ability to ask and strive to answer the questions of:

1. What is basketball (past, present, future)?
2. How can we live up to its standards?
3. How can we continually set higher standards?
4. Is the team a community with parity rights (balancing vulnerability with self-harmony)?

If we transfer these questions to education we can ask:

1. What is education (past, present, future)?
2. How can we live up to its standards?
3. How can we continually set higher standards?
4. Is the school a community with parity rights (a balancing of vulnerability with self-harmony)?

Answers to these questions can help us deal with the purposes and methods of education as they relate to student rights in the context of a cultural setting. These questions also call attention to perspective, craftsmanship and intrinsic motivation which, in turn, points to that education conceived here as most useful: useful to the individual in terms of satisfaction, employment and personal decision making; useful to society in terms of responsible citizenship; and, useful to the cultural heritage in terms of the discovery of new knowledge.

If we are concerned about the ethics of our profession vis-a-vis students, then we must be willing to share with them that measure of equal consideration made logically unavoidable by the knowledge that they will dwell in the house of tomorrow alone...without us. The best we can do, then, is to develop <u>with</u> them a sense of perspective. Ethics, in essence, is perspective...a view of time, place and culture that transcends our brief moment here and gives all of us the criteria for grace, beauty, truth, work, faith and justice.